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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SKOPJE 000394

SIPDIS
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NATO](#) [MK](#)
SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: ELECTION RE-RUNS PASS MUSTER;
SHORTCOMINGS REMAIN

REF: SKOPJE 390 AND PREVIOUS

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) The conduct of voting in parliamentary election re-runs on June 15 improved substantially compared to the June 1 elections, which had been marred by violence, intimidation and widespread electoral fraud. Significantly and visibly increased police presence created a safer, more secure voting environment; police acted decisively in several instances to detain trouble-makers. Despite the improvement, election observers noted serious irregularities -- including ballot stuffing and proxy voting -- at a number of polling stations. In a number of stations, the local election board (with mostly DPA members) was complicit in the fraud. The results of the voting, according to State Electoral Commission figures, give eAlbanian DUI a strong lead (18 seats) over governing coalition rival DPA (11 seats). ODIHR assessed the re-run voting positively, but said that would not change its overall assessment that the parliamentary elections had fallen short of key OSCE and Council of Europe commitments. DPA intends to appeal the re-voting in DUI strongholds, where it claims (unrealistically) that DUI activists "stole" roughly 35,000 votes. We assess that DPA's more prevalent involvement in electoral fraud was off-set by the freedom for DUI's voters to vote, and that the June 15 results announced by the SEC are valid and should be the basis for acting to seat parliament and form a new government. End summary.

VOTING IRREGULARITIES

12. (U) Mostly ethnic Albanian citizens voted in parliamentary election re-runs in nearly 187 polling stations in three of Macedonia's six electoral districts on June 15. International and domestic election monitors observed regular voting procedures in most polling stations, but also noted serious irregularities -- including ballot stuffing, proxy voting, and failure to follow proper procedures in the conduct and counting of the vote -- in a number of other stations. The State Electoral Commission (SEC) closed four polling stations after observers noted serious procedural irregularities and unidentified persons stole ballot materials.

13. (U) Large numbers of eAlbanian women voted, most of them brought to polling stations by male relatives or -- in a

negative departure from past elections -- by party activists who instructed them which candidate to vote for. Overall turnout in the three districts was 48.9 percent of registered voters, well below the June 1 national turnout of about 57 percent. The SEC has ordered re-runs in four polling stations that were closed on June 15 due to various irregularities. The re-voting will involve approximately 3,000 registered voters, possibly enough to affect only one MP seat.

TIGHTER SECURITY, POLICE PROACTIVE

¶4. (SBU) Security for the voting improved significantly compared to June 1, when police around polling stations were only lightly deployed and election monitors noted numerous instances of police complicity in electoral fraud. The Ministry of Interior's (MOI's) revised security plan called for a more robust uniformed police and police special forces presence, which was apparent at nearly all polling stations. This was a very positive deterrent to party thugs, and contributed to preventing violence and overt intimidation.

¶5. (SBU) Police pre-emptively detained known party agitators at one polling station, arrested two individuals for stealing a ballot box, and detained one male for brandishing his pistol in a polling station. At several polling sites, Local Election Board (LEB) members asked police to withdraw entirely from the station, but the police refused to do so. No major security incidents were reported, and previous security "hot spots" -- in Cair and Arachinovo -- remained quiet throughout the day, indicating that party leaders did

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instruct their supporters and enforcers not to cause trouble (reftel).

RESULTS GIVE DUI STRONG LEAD OVER DPA

¶6. (U) The SEC published initial results of the voting showing eAlbanian opposition DUI with a strong lead over DPA, the eAlbanian coalition partner of governing VMRO. According to SEC figures, VMRO now has 63 seats in the 120-seat parliament (retaining its absolute majority), while opposition SDSM trails with just 27 MPs. DUI has 18 seats, DPA 11, and a multi-ethnic "micro-party" has one MP. According to the SEC, the new parliament should be constituted on June 20.

DUI CROWS, DPA CRIES FOUL

¶7. (SBU) DUI VP Teuta Arifi told us June 15 that the party was pleased with the results of the voting, and that the June 15 process has been "fair and correct." She said DUI also was pleased with the heavier police presence, but planned nevertheless to complain about government inaction that had made the re-run voting necessary to begin with, a position echoing comments made by ODIHR and other observers. DPA initially claimed victory in the voting, insisting that it had won 13 seats and that it had stemmed the DUI tide. By late in the evening on June 15, however, DPA's spokesman said the party was convinced DUI had "stolen" more than 35,000 of the votes it had received in traditional DUI strongholds, and that it would appeal poll results in many of those areas. (Comment: We believe DPA may hope to maintain inter-party tensions and drag out the government formation process through repeated appeals and revoting, an approach we will oppose. End Comment.)

PEACEFUL RE-RUNS DON'T CHANGE ODIHR'S OVERALL ASSESSMENT

¶8. (U) ODIHR assessed the re-runs positively, noting that the significant security improvements had "enabled most people to

freely cast their vote." ODIHR added, however, that that did not "alter the assessment that while well-administered, certain key OSCE and Council of Europe commitments were not met in the overall parliamentary election process." It also noted that "cases of tensions and intimidation remained evident in the run-up to and on June 15."

COMMENT

19. (SBU) If DPA succeeds in its appeals (due 48 hours after the June 15 voting), yet another round of re-voting is unlikely to change the overall outcome significantly. We will work on getting the government and political parties to focus instead on forming a new parliament quickly, and on the coalition-building negotiations likely to take place over the next several weeks. PM Gruevski could find it difficult to again woo DPA, since the re-run results clearly indicate that party was at fault for the bulk of the June 1 irregularities.

He also will also find it difficult to cut a deal with DUI, however, given the likelihood that DUI's strong, 18-seat win will drive it to make maximalist demands of Gruevski. Gruevski's own 63-seat absolute majority, in turn, will further compound coalition talks, since he will insist on negotiating from a position of strength in which substantial concessions to a junior coalition partner -- especially to DUI -- will be difficult to justify to his grassroots supporters. We will begin working immediately with our EU colleagues to induce flexibility in the DUI position, using the goodwill earned over the past weeks as we have pushed the GOM and the SEC to ensure a freer, fairer voting process that has -- in the end -- more accurately reflected the will of the eAlbanian voters.

Milovanovic